

Presentation to Little Sisters of the Poor
Fall 1994

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"Suffering and Health"

I. The Passion of Christ

A. Was it necessary?

1. St. Thomas Part III, Quest. 46-50
2. Why was it necessary?

B. Why is there human suffering?

1. Distinguish pain, suffering, redemption
2. The effects of the cross----death.
3. The choice: to have pain and suffering enter into the mystery of redemption. (PJP II "On Human Suffering")

II. What is health?

A. St. Thomas: Health is a quality of the soul

1. It is in the same category as acts, habits, virtues, and grace.
2. It is not something just biochemical
3. It is something that enters the spirit because we are a composit.

B. Consider the passion of sorrow

1. St. Thomas' on St. Augustine's toothache- Q. 37 article 1.
2. Ways to overcome sorrow.

"Suffering and Health"

Examine the mystery of suffering and health in relation to the Passion of Christ.

I. St. Thomas on why the Passion of Christ was necessary

A. *Summa Theologiae*, III 46-50

After distinguishing many different senses of necessary St. Thomas concludes that it was necessary because of God's justice: "By His Passion Christ made satisfaction for the sin of the human race and set us free from the punishment of sin" and by God's Mercy since we alone could not make this satisfaction for all human beings." Q. 46, art. 1, reply obj. 3 The Passion also had the following five further results

1. This led to a desire in us to love God more
2. to imitate Jesus' virtues in the passion (obedience, humility, constancy, justice, etc)
3. to welcome the grace and glory that came by way of the Passion
4. to refrain from sin because we "were bought for such a great price"
5. to recognize the great dignity of human life because Christ suffered and died as a human being

B. What else happened in the Passion? Christ endured all kinds of human sufferings.

1. exterior sensible pain- in the wounds of his body, head-from crown of piercing thorns, hands and feet from the fastening of the nails, face from blows and spittle, body from lashes, touch by scourged and nailed, taste by vinegar and gall, smell by stench of corpses on calvary, hearing by being tormented by the cries of blasphemers and corners, in sight by the tears of his disciples

2. interior pain or sorrow- by friends abandoning him, by the ruining of his reputation, by mockeries, blasphemes, and insults, by sadness, weariness, and fear (Q. 46, art 5)

C. How Christ suffer--- in his whole soul?

1. No. He suffered in all his lower powers of the soul, but not in the highest power of reason, whose object is God, who is the cause not of suffering but of joy. (Q 46, art 8)

2. Therefore, the joy of fruition is not opposed to the grief of the Passion because they do not have the same object. (rpl. obj 1)

3. Jesus Christ suffered in his flesh, not in his Divine nature. (art. 12)

4. He also suffered by free choice in obedience to God's will. (Q. 47, art. 2, rep. obj.2) God the Father did not force him, but inspired him "with the will to suffer for us." out of love for us (Q. 47 art.3)

a. suffering itself is caused by an external principle (the body is the instrument-Q 49, art 6, pre. obj 1)

b. but if freely chosen then willingly carried by an interior principle (Q 48, art 1, rep. obj 1) and the soul is the source of meriting (Q. 49, art. 6, rep. obj 1)

5. Christ also, to demonstrate the fullness of his love for us prayed for his persecutors on the cross (repl obj 1)

D. How can we relate to this mystery of Christ's suffering?

1. Since Christ is the mystic head of one body, and in so far as two persons are members of the same body, one can atone for the other. (Q. 48, art. 3 rep. obj.1.)

i. we become incorporated with Christ through Baptism

ii. we are adopted "as sons and daughters" (Q 49, art 3, rep. obj 3)

iii. we become his Spouse as religious in "one Spirit" (MD)

2. St. Augustine notes 4 things in any sacrifice:

i. to whom it is offered

ii. by whom it is offered

iii. what is offered

iv. and for whom it is offered

3. "Christ made satisfaction, not by giving money or anything of the sort, but by bestowing what was of greatest price---Himself---for us. And therefore Christ's Passion is called our redemption." (Q 48, art 4)

E. Summary re Christ's Passion:

1. Disease and death are the consequence of original sin

2. Pain and suffering are also the consequence of original sin

3. Redemption comes through Jesus Christ's free act in His Passion, to pay for the consequences of this sin with Himself, by undergoing Suffering, Passion, and Death in his Human Nature, His Flesh out of love for us.

4. By Baptism and our Vocation we are called into complete union with Christ, our Head and our Spouse

5. Therefore, we can also participate in the redemptive activity of atoning through pain and suffering when it is freely chosen out of love.

6. This kind of participation brings joy.

II. The Holy Father's Apostolic Letter on The Christian Meaning of Human Suffering

A. In 1984 Pope John Paul II elaborated in contemporary language this great mystery of the redemptive suffering of Jesus Christ.

1. Quoting Saint Paul's statement: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake" (Col. 1:24) the Holy Father invites us into the mystery of "The joy [which] comes from the discovery of the meaning of suffering." #1
2. However, it is very difficult for human beings to reach this quality of interior conversion because they experience suffering as an evil.
 - a. suffering "expresses a situation in which man experiences evil and in doing so becomes the subject of suffering" #7
 - b. "Man suffers on account of evil, which is a certain lack, limitation or distortion of good."
 - c. In each situation the question of the meaning of this suffering arises. Why?
 - d. Often this is experienced as guilt and punishment #10
 - e. But sometimes it is the "suffering of someone who is innocent (and) must be accepted as a mystery" e.g. Job #11. Here it is a test.
 - f. Sometimes meant for conversion #12
 - g. "But love is also the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering." #13
3. Here we discover the "entirely new dimension" of the theme of suffering and evil.
 - a." In his salvific mission the Son must therefore strike evil right at its transcendental roots from which it develops in human history. These transcendental roots of evil are founded in sin and death; for they are at the basis of the loss of eternal life. The mission of the only-begotten Son consists in conquering sin and death. He conquers sin by his obedience unto death, and he overcomes death by his resurrection." #14.
 - b. Christ, the suffering servant, "suffers voluntarily and suffers innocently." #18
 - c. So "Christ gives the answer to the question about suffering and the meaning of suffering not only by his teaching...but most of all by his own suffering." #18
 - d. This is the linking of suffering with love.
 - e. This is why Christ rebuked Peter who wanted to make him "abandon" the suffering of death on the cross." #17

F. Christ suffers with everyone who suffers, and this is why everyone who suffers can enter into the redemptive suffering of Christ.

4. The Marian Role

- i. Simeon confirmed Mary's destiny to "share in the mission of her son" #25
- ii. She further participated in this at Calvary. Those who work with the suffering, as you do, participate in the Marian role. He calls this a new form of spiritual motherhood which transforms suffering by the power of God #26
- iii. Jesus invites all his disciples: "If you want to follow me then pick up your cross."
- iv. This is the Gospel of Suffering
- v. The victorious power of suffering is signed by the marks of Christ's crucifixion on his resurrected body : "Christ retains in his risen body the marks of the wounds of the cross in his hands, feet and side. #26
- vi. He leads us through the "very heart of his suffering" by interior conversion, to the truth of his resurrection and glory. It is a call: Come, Follow me!"
- vii. Elaborating the meaning of the parable of the Good Samaritan he concludes: "Everyone individually must feel as if called personally to bear witness to love in suffering." #29 and in this way participate in the mystery of the redemption.

III: What is health? How can we lead others to this conversion towards the Christian meaning of suffering?

A. Interesting to note that the Holy Father uses "Health" as a Salutation in many of his recent Encyclicals and Apostolic Letters. The Dignity of Woman, The Mother of the Redeemer, The Splendour of Truth.

- i. St. Thomas states that "health is a habit," a quality of the soul, or an act whereby someone can perform the operation of a healthy person.
- ii. Now a habit is a repeated act, and a virtue is a habit which perfects a power, so if we think back to Jesus' perfect act in his Suffering and Passion, of turning to God in the highest part of his soul, we could conclude that health involves this operation of turning towards Christ in the midst of suffering. If someone does this habitually, then they may be considered to be very healthy even if they are dying of disease. St. Augustine says "To the healthy and pure internal eye He is everywhere present." (On Christian Doctrine XII)

iii. St. Thomas states explicitly: "human virtue, which is attributed to reason, is said to be made perfect in infirmity, not of the reason indeed, but of the body and of the lower parts." (Pt I, Q 55, art. 3, rpl. obj. 3.) iv. So health is not just something of the body, something physiological or bio-chemical, it is a quality of the soul. It is something that enters the spirit because we are a composit.

B. Lets consider how we might begin to aid the development of this quality of the soul, we can call "health" in the midst of pain and sorrow.

i. Difference of Pain and Sorrow: Use St. Thomas distinction between the passion of pain which is the experience of a present evil cognized through the external senses and the passion of sorrow or sadness which is the experience of a present, past or future evil, cognized through the intelligence (See PT I-II Q 35-42)

ii. How can we help someone in a state of pain or sorrow to consider the redemptive meaning of suffering as described above?

a. St. Augustine describes the terrible effect of pain and how it interferes with our ability to think: "Although during those days I was tormented with a violent tooth-ache, I was not able to turn over in my mind other things than those I had already learnt; and as to learning anything, I was quite unequal to it, because it required undivided attention." (Soliq. i, 12 in St. Thomas I-II, Q 37)

b. By experience we know that too much pain or sorrow can have terrible effects on a person. Acute pain prevents us from learning anything, from giving attention to what we already know, hinders reason, prevents contemplation, paralyses the mind and body, promotes a weariness in the will, leads to a person closing up and withdrawing into the self, and has bad effects on the body.

c. At the same time moderate pain or sorrow can have very helpful effects: It can facilitate learning, it can induce us to avoid sin, and to avoid evil. Indeed the Holy Father adds: "It is suffering, more than anything else, which clears the way for the grace which transforms human souls." #27.

D. St. Thomas also suggests that there are particular remedies which are most effective to transform pain and suffering. He suggests four main categories of remedies:

- i. pleasure: tears, groans, words; laughter; sympathy of love of a friend; contemplation of truth; and sleep, rest, leisure, play and other bodily remedies- pleasure is the contrary passion to pain
- ii. anger: released in a moment of vengeance
- iii. hope: of forgiveness and repentance
- iv. joy

E. From my experience of living with the Little Sisters of the Poor I would say that these four remedies are practised in all sorts of ways:

- i. the pleasure of the beauty of the rooms and the dining, the encouragement of companionship, the leisure activities, physical care of guests, the intellectual and spiritual teaching
- ii. allowing anger to be expressed by the guests in safe and constructive ways
- iii. offering the sacrament of reconciliation and praying the rosary which builds hope
- iv. offering the sacrament of the eucharist, receiving those who die in dignity, which promotes joy
- v. Praying with those who suffer for the supernatural grace of the hope and joy of the resurrection which comes by passing freely through the mystery of the Passion which has been given to each person in his or her unique and unrepeatable vocation

F. Most of all being with those who suffer day and night and thereby in the Marian Mystery and the mystery of the good Samaritan, following Christ: "At one and the same time Christ has taught man to do good by his suffering and to do good to those who suffer. In this double aspect he has completely revealed the meaning of suffering." #30.

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